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ABSTRACT

This study surveyed 343 older students (twenty-five years old or older) at the University of Houston to determine their educational and career goals, their reasons for returning to college, changes brought about by college, and their satisfaction with aspects of college. Findings of the survey indicated that the students were relatively young (mostly ages 25-29) and primarily working, married, and without children. They were returning primarily because they were seeking job changes, although they also had strong intellectual interests. Multiple regression analyses, performed to investigate correlates of satisfaction with college and of affective changes occurring while in college, indicated that these two measures were predicted by different sets of variables. One important predictor set for both was time use and family reactions to time use. Student goals and their achievement predicted affective changes but not college satisfaction. College satisfaction, but not affective changes, was predicted by ratings of college facilities and the students' satisfaction with their own academic performance. Women were more satisfied with college than men, and women reported somewhat more postive affective changes than men. (Author/LRA)

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# Adults Attending College: Goals and Change

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ABSTRACT

Questionnaire data were collected from 343 male and female university students 25 years of age or older who were primarily in regular undergraduate programs. These students were relatively young (mostly ages 25-29) and primarily working, married, and without children. They were returning primarily because they were seeking job changes, although they also had strong intellectual interests. Multiple regression analyses, performed to investigate correlates of satisfaction with college and of affective changes occurring while in college, indicated that these two measures were predicted by different sets of variables. One important predictor set ~~for both~~ was time use and family reactions to time use. Student goals and their achievement predicted affective changes but not college satisfaction. College satisfaction, but not affective changes, was predicted by ratings of college facilities and the students' satisfaction with their own academic performance. Lack of sex interactions indicated that men and women were affected by the same factors. Women reported higher levels of college satisfaction and slightly more positive affective changes than men.

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Adults Attending College: Goals and Change

A major change in higher education today is the increasing number of adults enrolling in the regular programs of colleges and universities. As the pool of younger students shrinks in the future, it will become more important for colleges and universities to accommodate these older students and help them adjust to the combination of school with work and family responsibilities. There is very little systematic information about the special problems and needs of adults in regular education. Accordingly, we undertook to survey a sample of older students at the University of Houston. This university is well suited for this type of research since half of its students are over 23 years of age.

The survey questionnaire asked these students about their educational and career goals, and their reasons for interrupting their education and for returning. They were also asked about changes brought about by college, and about their satisfaction with aspects of college.

In spring of 1978, a systematic sample of 726 students 25 years old or older who were not in formal graduate training programs was selected at the Central Campus of the University of Houston. Over three-quarters were undergraduates. The questionnaire was mailed to these students. Thirty-nine were undeliverable, and 48% of the remainder responded (343 individuals).

## Results

### Demographic Characteristics

Demographic and occupational characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. There were about as many women (44%) as men (56%). Most were married, childless, and under 35 years of age. They were predominantly white. Most were working full-time, and modal family income was in the $10,000-$19,999 range. The modal job category for the women was

secretarial and sales, and the next largest group was not employed. The modal job category for the men was skilled worker, and executive and engineer-scientist were the next largest categories.

Educational Status

The educational characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 2. These students were predominantly juniors and seniors who returned after interrupting their education for a year or more (typically for 3 to 5 years). Most women were enrolled in humanities or fine arts, business administration, education, or social sciences. Most men were enrolled in business administration, technology, or science/engineering. Men interrupted their education mostly because of lack of interest or need to work. For women, the primary reasons were need to work and marriage. The importance of various reasons for returning are presented in Table 3. For both groups, the primary reason for returning was dissatisfaction with their jobs. One quarter of the returnees lost substantial income when they returned.

Goals and Plans

The goals and plans of the respondents are presented in Table 4. The educational expectations of both groups were very similar. About one quarter expected just a Bachelor's degree, and the rest expected to do some graduate work. About one half expected to obtain a Master's degree.

Nearly all students planned careers, although men and women differed in their specific career plans. The modal intended occupation of both groups was as an executive. The only other large job category for men was engineering and science. Other major areas of career interest for women were education, helath and social service.

Students were asked to rate how important various objectives in

college were to them and to indicate the most important one. Preparing for a better job or career advancement was the most important objective, and intellectual stimulation was next most often picked. Achieving a sense of identity and values followed as a poor third. Both the job and intellectual objectives were rated as important or very important by about 85% of the students, and the identity objective was so rated by about half the students.

Prediction of Satisfaction

Satisfaction was measured two ways, by ratings of satisfaction with college and affective changes brought about by college. Satisfaction with college was assessed by a rating on a five point scale of satisfaction with "your college situation, your experience as a student." Affective changes were measured by an index based on four items measuring changes (in self-confidence, sense of well-being, anxiety/worries, and guilt feelings) brought about by college attendance. Students were asked to indicate whether there were large decreases, decreases, no change, increases, or large increases in each of these feelings. These two measures are not strongly correlated ($r = .37$).

Two hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed to investigate the relation of various predictors to these measures of satisfaction. The predictor variables were entered hierarchically in nine sets. First, there was a set of demographic and background variables: sex, age, ethnic group, marital status, number of dependents, family income, years out of school, class level, and college program. Next, there were three sets of external life variables--Time variables: emphasis on housework and schoolwork rather than paid work, and satisfaction with amount of time for everything; Family variables: family reactions to time

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and money spent on college, and family approval of college education; and Job/finance variables: satisfaction with job and satisfaction with finances. Next, there were two sets of student goals variables--Occupational/degree goals: occupational goal items and degree goal items; and College goals: three items measuring the importance of preparation for a career/job advancement, intellectual stimulation/becoming more educated, and achievement of a sense of identity and values. Finally, there were four sets measuring aspects of college--Satisfaction with college facilities: admissions/registration, advisement/counseling, degree requirements, instruction/scheduling/financial aid, child care; Achievement of Goals: achievement of job goals and achievement of intellectual/personal goals; Academic Performance: satisfaction with own academic performance and reported GPA; and College satisfaction (used as a predictor only for affective changes). Several of the predictors were composites created by factor analysis.

Women were significantly ($p < .05$) more satisfied with college than men, and women reported somewhat ($p < .10$) more positive affective changes than men. Preliminary regression analyses evaluating the interaction of sex with the predictor variables indicated that separate regression analyses for men and women were not warranted, however. Satisfaction seemed to be predicted by the same factors for both men and women.

The results of the two regression analyses are presented in Table 5. Only the variables within a set that were significant predictors of satisfaction or affective changes are shown. The multiple correlations ($R$) were .69 for college satisfaction and .64 for affective changes.

Of the demographic variables, only sex and the student's college

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program were predictive (Technology students were more satisfied). All the sets of external life variables were significantly predictive. Student goals sets predicted affective changes but not college satisfaction. Items in these sets that were not predictive were occupational goal and importance of getting job preparation in college. Different patterns of predictors emerged for the two dependent measures from the set measuring aspects of college. For college satisfaction, satisfaction with college facilities and academic performance were the significant predictor sets. On the other hand, for affective changes, achievement of goals and college satisfaction were the significant predictors.

## Discussion

Generally, these adult students are young, married, without children, and working. The women do not fit the conception of the housewife who returns to college once the children are grown. Both men and women seem to have been catalyzed to return by job dissatisfaction. However, their practical career goals are balanced by strong intellectual interests. This is fortunate, since intellectual interest is related to positive affective changes that occur while attending college.

Satisfaction is related to some external non-college factors which probably have a continuing effect on the adult college student. One important factor is lack of time. Combining work, home maintenance, and studying is difficult for many of these students, and the reactions of their families to this strain also affect them. Other important external factors are satisfaction with their jobs and their financial situations.

Affective changes and college satisfaction were predicted by different



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sets of variables from the student goals and college aspects sets. Student goals and their achievement in college predicted affective changes. Surprisingly, however, they did not predict college satisfaction. On the other hand, ratings of college facilities and satisfaction with academic performance predicted college satisfaction, but not affective changes.

While colleges can make internal improvements to help adult students, changes in the jobs and family lives of these students can also make their college experience more rewarding. Colleges, families, and employers can all help solve the serious problem of the adult's lack of time to be student, employee, and family member simultaneously.



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Table 1

Demographic and Occupational Characteristics:
Proportions of Men and Women in Each Category

| Variable | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|
| Age | | |
| 25-29 | .57 | .49 |
| 30-34 | .28 | .28 |
| 35 or older | .15 | .23 |
| Ethnic/Racial*[a] | | |
| White/Caucasian-American | .75 | .90 |
| Spanish-speaking American | .12 | .03 |
| Black/Negro/Afro-American | .04 | .02 |
| Other | .09 | .04 |
| Marital status** | | |
| Single | .30 | .22 |
| Married | .62 | .58 |
| Other (63% divorced) | .07 | .20 |
| Number of dependents (not including spouse) | | |
| 0 | .62 | .56 |
| 1 | .17 | .17 |
| 2 or more | .22 | .27 |
| Family income** | | |
| Less than $10,000 | .28 | .21 |
| $10,000-$19,999 | .38 | .33 |
| $20,000-$29,999 | .26 | .26 |
| $30,000 or more | .09 | .20 |
| Present occupation (or occupation prior to entering college)* | | |
| None or other | .16 | .29 |
| Semiskilled or unskilled work | .05 | .05 |
| Sales, secretarial | .14 | .38 |
| Skilled worker, technician | .26 | .03 |
| Professional: science, engineering, etc. | .16 | .03 |
| Professional: education, social services, health | .05 | .13 |
| Executive, manager, lawyer, accountant | .16 | .06 |
| Hours working for pay* | | |
| None | .10 | .36 |
| Part-time (66% half-time or more) | .22 | .27 |
| Full-time | .67 | .37 |

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(Table 1 continued)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Hours working around residence[b]*** | | |
| 0-9 | .57 | .26 |
| 10-19 | .32 | .30 |
| 20-29 | .09 | .22 |
| 30 or more | .02 | .22 |

[a] Differences between men and women ($\chi^2$ tests): * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

[b] This includes housework, yardwork, meal preparation, and child care.

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Table 2

Educational Characteristics:
Proportions of Men and Women in Each Category

| Variable | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|
| Credit hour enrollment | | |
| 1-7 | .53 | .48 |
| 8-13 | .32 | .34 |
| 14 or more | .15 | .18 |
| Years out of school***[a] | | |
| Less than 1 | .18 | .09 |
| 1-2 | .22 | .17 |
| 3-5 | .34 | .28 |
| 6-10 | .16 | .21 |
| More than 10 | .10 | .25 |
| Educational level | | |
| Freshman or Sophomore | .10 | .14 |
| Junior | .26 | .33 |
| Senior | .39 | .30 |
| Postbaccalaureate | .25 | .22 |
| Major/college program*** | | |
| Humanities or Fine Arts | .07 | .32 |
| Social Sciences or Education | .11 | .26 |
| Business Administration | .25 | .21 |
| Science, Mathematics, or Engineering | .29 | .14 |
| Other (80% Technology) | .28 | .08 |
| Reasons for interrupting education[b]** | | |
| Need to work/Job demands | .27 | .27 |
| Funds not available | .08 | .04 |
| Lack of motivation/Goal indecision/Uncertainty | .30 | .21 |
| Graduated/Achieved educational goal(s) | .08 | .04 |
| Marriage | .02 | .22 |
| Pregnancy or children | .01 | .09 |
| Moved to different location | .06 | .05 |
| Jointed military/drafted | .12 | .01 |
| Other reasons | .07 | .07 |

[a] Differences between men and women ($\chi^2$ tests): * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

[b] Only students who had been out of school for at least a full year (n = 295) were asked this question.

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Table 3

Importance of Factors which Influence the Decision to Return to School: Proportions of Men and Women in each Category

| Factor | Sex | Rating: Not a Factor | Slightly Important | Important | Very Important | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dissatisfaction with Job | Male | .21 | .12 | .24 | .43 | *[a] |
| | Female | .36 | .12 | .15 | .37 | |
| Boredom | Male | .54 | .15 | .25 | .06 | ** |
| | Female | .33 | .31 | .16 | .20 | |
| Availability of Funds | Male | .42 | .25 | .19 | .14 | |
| | Female | .43 | .25 | .24 | .08 | |

Note: Only students who had been out of school for at least a full year (n=295) were asked these questions.

[a] Differences between men and women ($\chi^2$ tests): * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

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Table 4

Goals and Plans: Proportions of Men and Women in Each Category

| Variable | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|
| Degree goal | | |
| Bachelors or less or other | .30 | .24 |
| Some postbaccalaureate training | .13 | .07 |
| Masters | .45 | .53 |
| Higher degree or law degree | .13 | .16 |
| Career goal**[a] | | |
| None or other | .06 | .13 |
| Sales or skilled trades | .06 | .13 |
| Professional: education, social services, health | .11 | .38 |
| Professional: science, engineering, etc. | .35 | .10 |
| Executive, manager, lawyer, or accountant | .43 | .26 |
| Plans immediately following graduation** | | |
| Get or seek employment | .18 | .29 |
| Change careers | .14 | .14 |
| Promotion or advancement in same career | .35 | .15 |
| Attend graduate school | .10 | .20 |
| No change | .12 | .10 |
| Other | .10 | .12 |
| Most important college goal | | |
| Job preparation or career advancement | .64 | .56 |
| Intellectual stimulation | .21 | .32 |
| Meet new people | .01 | .01 |
| Identity and values | .14 | .10 |
| Importance of job preparation goal* | | |
| Not at all important | .02 | .10 |
| Slightly important | .11 | .10 |
| Important | .28 | .20 |
| Very important | .60 | .60 |
| Importance of intellectual stimulation goal** | | |
| Not at all important | .05 | .00 |
| Slightly important | .17 | .04 |
| Important | .43 | .40 |
| Very important | .35 | .56 |
| Importance of identity and values goals | | |
| Not at all important | .26 | .18 |
| Slightly importnat | .31 | .25 |
| Important | .25 | .36 |
| Very important | .17 | .21 |

[a] Differences between men and women ($\chi^2$ tests): * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Regression Results: Prediction of College Satisfaction and Affective Changes

| Predictor[a] | College Satisfaction $R^2$ change | Simple r | F | Affective Changes $R^2$ change | Simple r | F |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Demographics/background (12) | .06 | | 2.93** | .05 | | 2.23* |
| Sex | | .13 | | | .10 | (*) |
| College program: Technology | | .06 | (*) | | .06 | (*) |
| Time variables (2) | .07 | | 40.62*** | .01 | | 3.52* |
| Time Emphasis | | .20 | (*) | | .14 | |
| Satisfaction with time | | .25 | (***) | | .08 | |
| Family variables (2) | .06 | | 16.49*** | .03 | | 6.91** |
| Family reactions | | .32 | (***) | | .18 | (*) |
| Job/finances variables (2) | .05 | | 14.67*** | .06 | | 15.58*** |
| Job satisfaction | | .25 | (**) | | .24 | (***) |
| Financial satisfaction | | .27 | (*) | | .16 | |
| Occupational/degree goals (6) | .02 | | 2.06 | .02 | | 2.15* |
| Masters degree goal | | .16 | | | .10 | (*) |
| Postbaccalaureate coursework only | | -.08 | | | .01 | (*) |
| College goals (3) | .01 | | 2.38 | .06 | | 9.95*** |
| Intellectual stimulation | | .17 | | | .23 | (*) |
| Sense of identity and values | | .16 | | | .27 | (**) |
| College facilities (5) | .15 | | 17.01*** | .01 | .24 | <1 |
| Advisement/Counseling | | .35 | (*) | | .14 | |
| Degree Requirements/Curriculum | | .37 | (*) | | .20 | |
| Instruction/Scheduling/Financial Aid | | .50 | (***) | | .22 | |
| Achievement of Goals (2) | .01 | | 2.68 | .14 | | 36.19*** |
| Achievement of Job Goals | | .17 | | | .36 | (***) |
| Achievement of Intellectual/ Personal Goals | | .31 | | | .51 | (***) |
| Academic performance (2) | .05 | | 13.25*** | .00 | | <1 |
| Satisfaction with Performance | | .47 | (***) | | .20 | |
| Reported GPA | | .26 | | | .10 | |
| College satisfaction (0 or 1) | | -- | -- | .02 | .37 | 9.49** |

[a] Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of predictors in each set.

[b] F values refer to the variance accounted for by each set of predictor variables. Asterisks in parentheses indicate significance levels for individual predictor variables.